



SENATOR
MICHELLE A. McMANUS
McManus Minutes



Serving the 35th District • P.O. Box 30036 • Lansing, MI 48909

PHONE: (517) 373-1725 • TOLL FREE: 1-866-305-2135 • FAX: (517) 373-0741

EMAIL: senmmcmanus@senate.michigan.gov • WEBSITE: www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/mcmanus

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EXTENSION PROGRAMS SAVED FROM BUDGET CUTS

Thanks to the hard work and leadership by the Michigan Senate during the budget compromise, the Ag Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension programs, including 4-H, will continue without any funding cuts. In addition, we were able to reach the following budget agreements: the cut to K-12 education has been reduced to less than \$100 per student, the cut to higher education has been reduced to as low as 2 percent, and businesses will face less burden from taxes on healthcare for their employees.

SENATE PASSES ID THEFT PROTECTION PACKAGE

This week we were able to overwhelmingly pass a broad reform package that will help stop the explosion of identity theft in Michigan and help victims get their good credit back. In 2002 alone, 4,640 people in Michigan reported having their identity stolen to the Federal Trade Commission. Key parts of the package would prohibit denying or reducing credit to ID theft victims; stop soliciting or extending credit to consumers by mailing unsolicited checks and similar items; give police and prosecutors the power to open criminal investigations and bring cases in the jurisdiction where the victim resides or where the crime was committed; and create a standardized certificate ID theft victims can use to prove their identity has been used for fraudulent purposes so they can restore their credit histories more quickly. For more information on identity theft, including a consumer brochure or palm card on tips to protect yourself from identity theft, contact my office toll-free at (866) 305-2135.

MICHIGAN ELECTIONS TO BE CONSOLIDATED

This week in the Senate we voted to consolidate Michigan elections to four specific dates each year. The four dates are the fourth Tuesday in February and the first Tuesday following the first Monday in May, August and November. A fifth floater date is possible for school districts to hold a millage or bond issue if enough petition signatures are obtained. This reform puts all elections in the state under the jurisdiction of county, township or municipal clerks which will remove confusion about where a person applies for an absentee ballot or who they contact to register to vote.

SENATE TO CONSIDER CCW PERMIT REFORM

Legislation I introduced Tuesday in the Michigan Senate would transfer the authority to issue concealed weapons permits from local county gun boards to the Secretary of State. Under Senate Bill 891, anyone seeking weapons permits would apply at their local Secretary of State office rather than through their county clerk. The legislation and Senate Bill 892, a companion bill, now go before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

MICHIGAN'S SMALL BUSINESSES TO SEE HEALTHCARE TAX RELIEF

Small businesses in Michigan will see relief from one of the state's most cumbersome tax burdens, opening the door for greater healthcare benefits for working families, thanks to legislation we overwhelmingly passed by in the Michigan Senate Thursday. Senate Bills 672 and 673 will reduce the taxes paid by employers on healthcare benefits under the state's Single Business Tax by 20 percent in 2005 and an additional 20 percent in 2006. This legislation created the 41st and 42nd tax cuts in the era of Republican-led tax relief. The \$15 million in savings for 2005 and 2006 can be used by businesses to invest in jobs and employees.